

Ideas for Adapting Toys

Battery-powered toys

- It is possible to insert a battery-interrupter into many “action” toys to make them switch accessible. (example – piggy that walks forward and grunts)
- It is possible to use many on-hand items to make unique switches.
- A jack can be inserted in the toy (with some solder and a drill) to adapt it permanently for use with a switch.

Crayons

- If a child has difficulty holding a crayon the typical way, fat crayons can be adapted by placing a small wooden doll head on the top of it. This gives the child a “ball” to grasp.
- Fat crayons can be made from leftover pieces of crayons. Peel them and put the pieces in a greased muffin pan. Bake at 275° until the crayons have melted. Do NOT move the pan! Turn the oven off and pull the pan out after it has thoroughly cooled. This will give you round crayon disks. It’s okay to put different colored pieces in the same muffin cup. As long as the pan is not moved until cool, the colors will not run together.
- To make chunky crayons, you use film canisters. One crayon requires the equivalent of at least six whole crayons. (I often mix similar colors.) Peel them and melt them in a small saucepan. Pour the melted wax into the greased film canisters. I’ve found that you need to poke a hole in the center when partially cool to get rid of the center air pocket. When cool, pop the crayon out or peel the canister away. (*Film canisters can often be gotten for free at newspapers and film developing sites.*)
- If a child cannot press a crayon hard enough to create marks, consider having them use markers instead.

Art Projects & Writing

- For painting, a natural sponge can be easier to grasp than a paintbrush.
- A Velcro® “handle” can be crafted for a child’s hand. The corresponding Velcro® can be placed on the back of sponges and attached to the handle as needed.
- If the child cannot hold a paintbrush or marker, a ruler with a Velcro® “handle” can be secured on the child’s arm. Brushes and markers can then be attached to the ruler.
- Placing a notebook on its side can make a quick slant board. (The rings would be on the far side.) To make a resting ledge for it, hot-glue some sponge strips on the side closest to the user.
- To hold papers in place without damaging them, use removable scotch® tape. (It uses Post-It® type glue.)
- For Scotch® tape, consider the pop-up tape dispensers or the office-type desk models. Those require only one hand to use.
- For glue, use glue sticks.
- If a child has difficulty with using scissors, Fiskars® spring-loaded clippers may help. They can be used by pressing down; they automatically open back up.
- If they are supposed to “draw” for their journal or stories at school, shape stamps could enable them to draw what they really want to communicate.
- Water balloons, bean bags and even socks filled with oatmeal can be used as paint “brushes”. The water balloons can be tossed at paper that has had tempura paint powder placed on it. The beanbags and socks can be dipped in paint and then flung or “bopped” against the paper.

Puzzles

- For making your own pegged puzzles, glue something easy for the child to grasp on each puzzle piece. Examples – little flocked bears or little wooden knobs. Use super-epoxy to minimize the risk of the pieces being pulled off and put into mouths!

- Small magnets can be placed on the back of puzzle pieces to use them on a magnetic board, such as a cookie sheet. This is good for putting them in logical or silly orders or using them in counting games. It also works for when the 5th piece of a five-piece puzzle is lost.
- For puzzles with a hundred plus pieces, obtain a special puzzle mat that was designed for moving puzzles from place to place. You can use them on a slanted board that may be easier for someone to work with.
- You can make your own puzzles from placemats that have been cut apart.
- Puzzle hint I learned from an elementary school teacher – give each puzzle a number. Write that number on the back of the puzzle and then write it on the back of each piece. Makes sorting out all the puzzle pieces in the bottom of the toy box or rescued from couch cushions much easier to put back.

Board Games

- Glue cookie sheets on the back of playing boards and then strong magnets on the playing pieces. This means you don't need as much fine motor control to put or move pieces on the board. Has extra bonus of making it harder for the pieces to get knocked over, reducing the cries of "my piece was up there."
Note: if the cookie sheets are new, rough them up with sandpaper before gluing them on. Also, make sure the cookie sheets are metal and not aluminum.
- Large dice can be found by buying the ones that hang over a car's rear view mirror. Cut the strings off and you're set.
- If it's hard to roll dice, they can be shaken in something like a coffee can and then dumped out.
- Make a large color spinner from a Lazy Susan.

Card Games

- If a person has visual impairments, they can use large playing cards.
- For holding cards, you can make cardholders using jar lids and a spring, or ready-made cardholders.

- For card games such as Go Fish, put magnet pieces on the back of the playing cards. They can be “picked up” with a piece of metal, such as a jar lid. To make the jar lid accessible, glue a knob on it.

Books

- For toddler books (thick coated pages), you can put a fuzzy Velcro® loop on each page to give the reader a handle to pull on.
- Make page fluffers with packing doodles and paper clips.
- Children love the books with sound buttons on the side. Sometimes the buttons require more finger control or strength than they have. Make a T-handle with a needlework-stretcher to give them more leverage to press the button with.
- Older children can use the “sticky fingers” gel to help them turn pages.

Making Games

- Diskette or trading card holder pages can be used to make basic matching or “Bingo” type games. They are durable; they can be used with numerous players, and are easy to change as interests change.
- Diskette or trading card holder pages can also be used to make an age appropriate game that’s also skill-appropriate. For example, Harry Potter pictures could be used to make a simple matching game.
- To easily create a more involved game, use a slide-holder page, which has more pockets.

Dolls, Stuffed Animals, Cars & Trucks

- Sew the dolls’ clothes together with elastic thread to make them easier to manipulate.
- Handles can be made out of many things, like thick wire. This can give the child a handle to use when pretending with their stuffed animal.
- If setting up a village, Velcro® can be placed on road signs and buildings so they will stick to auto-roof liner material, certain felts or flannel.

- Radio ("RC") or Infrared remote control race car sets can enable speedsters to fulfill their dreams.

Computers

- If there is a software program you think your child would enjoy if it just didn't move so fast, there are freeware programs you can download that can slow the computer down. For Mac's, go to the RJ Cooper website (<http://www.rjcooper.com>) and for Windows, go to CPU Killer's website (<http://www.cpunkiller.com/products/cpunkiller/index.html>).
- Shareware and freeware can be wonderful resources for trying out programs. These are programs distributed through the Internet that may cost a nominal fee (shareware) or may be available at no charge (freeware). You can find these by going to <http://www.shareware.com> or even using search engines. In Google.com, for example, you could search for only sites with shareware in the title of the page.
- For access, there are many different types of mice, trackballs and keyboards.

Miscellaneous

- Build up handles of garden tools, paintbrushes, and even wooden spoons with foam tubing (e.g. pipe insulation) or foam weather stripping pieces. (They have an adhesive back on them.)
- Actual photos of food objects for matching games can be copied from on-line grocery store web sites.
- Some toys require pushing buttons to activate them. (For example, Fisher Price tape players.) This may be too difficult for some children. Gluing on a longer handle gives the child more leverage when they press down.
- Rubberized shelf liner material can be used to hold objects in place. (e.g. dishes, easel board). It is not as strong as Dycem[®], but can often do the trick.
- To keep toys that move around in a contained area, use a hula-hoop.
- Play tables can be raised to make them accessible using PCV pipe or bed risers.
- Everyday objects to us are marvelous wonders to a child. What do you do that interests your child? What is needed to enable them to do that? For

example, they may not have the motor control to handle a large measuring cup, but they could manipulate a small one well enough to help you cook.

Resources

- The Big Muppets Book of Crafts (ISBN # 0761105263)
- Especially Messy Art Projects that are easy to clean
- Vermont Assistive Technology Project (1-800-750-6355)
- Toys “R” Us Toy Guide for Differently Abled Children
<http://www.toysrus.com/differentlyabled>
- Your child’s Occupational Therapist and Physical Therapist
- For glue advice, local hardware stores or craft centers
- Discount School Supplies (<http://www.earlychildhood.com/Store>)
- Lekotek Toy Resource Helpline / 1-800-573-4446
(<http://www.lekotek.org>)
- My favorite places – JoAnn Fabrics, Ben Franklin, Radio Shack, Staples, Dollar stores. Not to mention yard sales and thrift shops!

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